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# Restaurants, shops, sports: Avila is more than a beach

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On a cold and breezy Sunday afternoon, one doesn't often think of going to the beach. A trip to Avila beach makes for a good exception.

The last time me and my daughters, Kyla and Hannah, made the hour-long trip up to Avila pier, the beaches were closed due to a recent shark attack. This time, despite overcast skies, surfers and skim boarders were making use of the now open beaches. We joined them in the fun.

Along the pier, fishermen pulled in perch and I wished that I had made good on my plan to keep fishing gear in my van. There is a bait and tackle shop at the end of the pier for those who don't mind renting. We checked out other people's catches then ventured under the pier where five-inch orange and blue starfish clung to the pilings.

Kyla considers herself a brave, big



girl at the age of six, so she hung out over the water to admire the seals playing nearby. Hannah considers herself a scared, big girl at age four and clung terrified to my neck as I admired the seals.

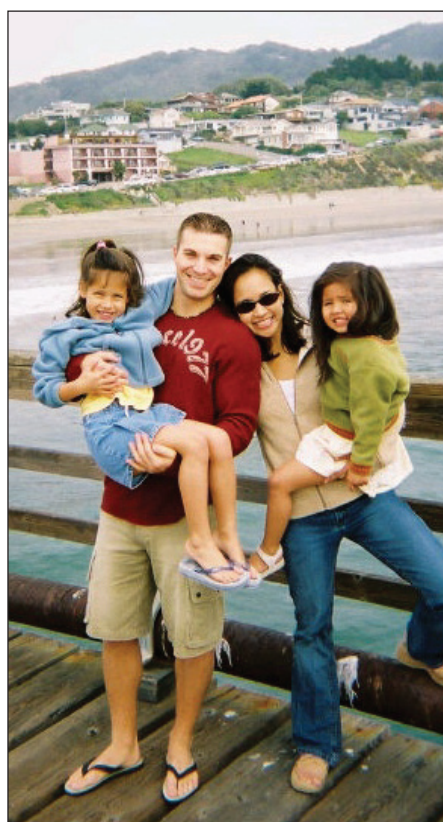
Next we made our way down to the water. My friend Matt had joined us for our beach excursion, and he and Kyla skipped rocks along the shore and generally got cold and wet. Hannah played in the sand while I practiced my handstands and built up an appetite.

There are several restaurants along the boardwalk in front of Avila pier. We chose The Old Custom House for its seafood selection and full bar. The girls sipped hot chocolate with their fish and chips while Matt and I enjoyed drinks, prawns and one of the best tuna melts I've had at a restaurant.

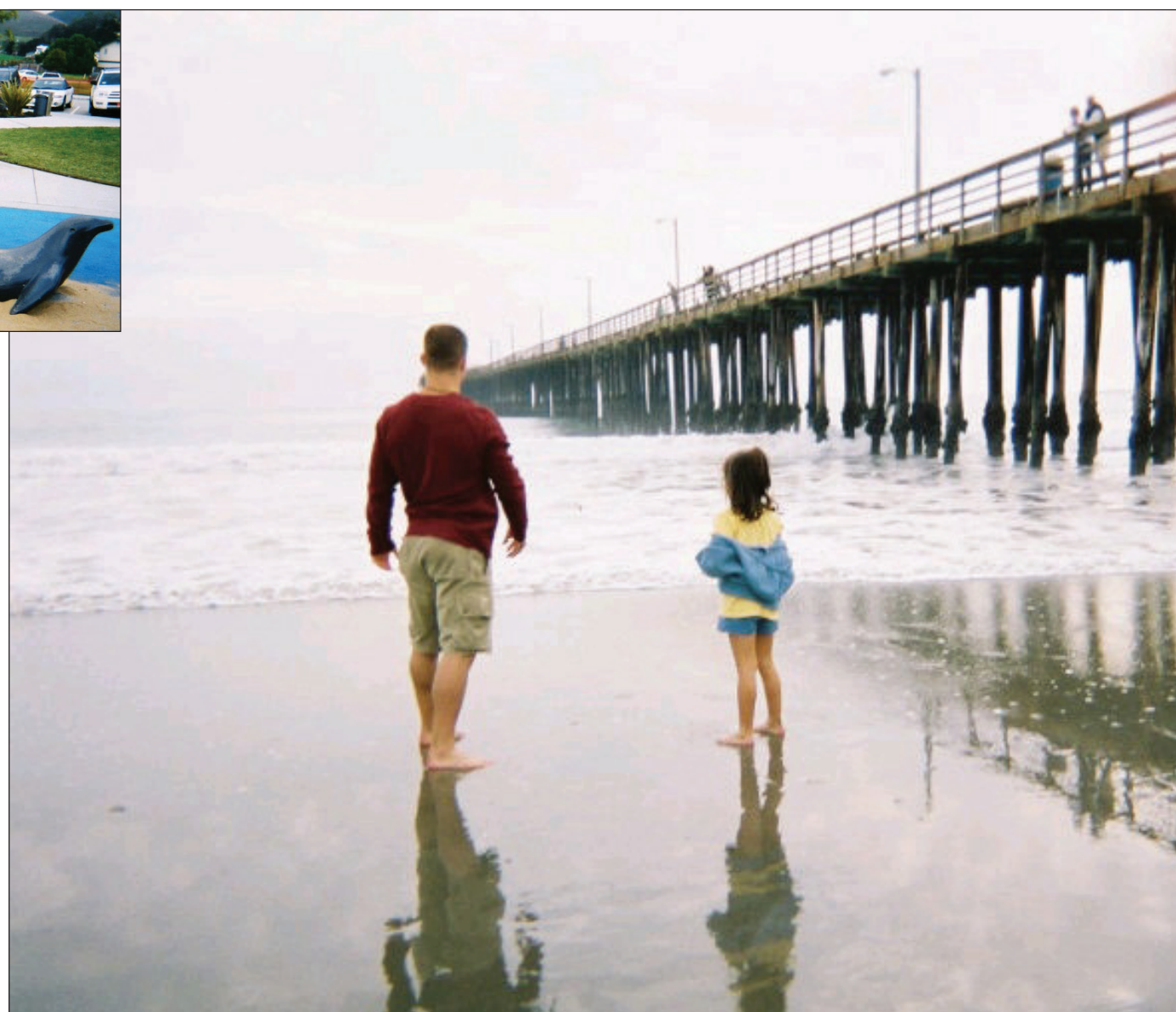
The view of the beach was beautiful so we took our time and the four of us shared a mocha chocolate cake. This is a bad idea if you plan on getting more than two bites. The prices were good and the food excellent. We fed four, including drinks, dessert and coffee for \$55. I recommend ordering your own dessert.

Despite the darkened skies, it really was a beautiful day at the beach and we took another walk down the pier before we headed home. There is an awesome children's park along the beach and the girls enjoyed the last rays of sun swinging and climbing on well-maintained equipment.

It was a great family trip and we plan on returning soon. Next time we'll arrive earlier in the day to take advantage of the bike rental shop on the boardwalk.



COURTESY PHOTO



PHOTOS BY 2ND LT. THERESA CUNNINGHAM

(Above) Matt Aron and Kyla Cunningham, 6, skipped rocks under the pier. They later braved going knee-deep into the cold water. (Inset) Kyla gets ready to jump onto the Avila park's rubber-padded playground. The park on the beach has swings, slides and a climbing fort. (Left) After seal watching, Theresa Cunningham, her daughters and Matt Aron ate seafood at one of four restaurants by the beach.

To get to Avila Pier take the 101 north. When you get to San Luis Obispo, take the Avila beach exit. Turn left which takes you under the bridge and follow the winding road. There is limited free parking near the park. There is additional parking across from the pier which costs \$3.